



"My Mistress Is Not at Home."

The LASH of CIRCUMSTANCE

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SYNOPSIS.

Abner Halliday, a miserly millionaire, is found gagged, bound and insensible in his room, his safe rifled and \$40,000 missing. The thread of the story is taken up by his nephew Tom. Living in the same house are other relatives, reckless Bruce Halliday and pretty Clare Winton. Bruce, who is a bond broker, has been trying to raise \$10,000 to put through a deal and save himself from financial ruin. He has applied to his miserly uncle and to others for the loan but has been refused. Tom sends for William LeDuc, an old-time friend connected with a detective agency. In relating the story Tom reverts to his acquaintance with Mrs. Dace, a wealthy widow, whose business agent is Richard Mackay, a hoodler and political boss. Tom is jealous of Mackay and is deeply in love with Mrs. Dace. Bruce Halliday warns him to shun her as an adventuress. Tom sees Mrs. Dace and Mackay together. He afterwards meets the woman at a horse race, and, happening to mention that Bruce had a tip on the winner, she gives him \$500 to place on the race. The tip goes wrong and she loses her money. Later Tom invests in stocks. He makes some money, and returns the lost \$500 to Mrs. Dace. It is at this juncture that the theft of the \$40,000 from old Abner Halliday occurs. LeDuc meets Clare and Bruce. He learns that the key which Clare had to the house is missing. Mackay's dealings with Mrs. Dace make Tom more jealous. The detective intimates a suspicion against Bruce Halliday as the thief. This Clare Winton indignantly repudiates. Mrs. Dace accepts Tom as her fiance.

CHAPTER XIII.—(Continued.)

"But nevertheless I am going to do it. Soul and body I want you to prevail, and your sacrifices to the common cause shall be mine. There will be enough wine left for us when we do not have to think of a tomorrow. Come. Let us go now." I looked around and then glanced at my watch. It was 11 o'clock and a steady stream of humanity was flowing towards the exit, as we wedged ourselves into it. Once outside the enclosure I started the motor and taking my place assisted her to her seat, standing erect for a moment thereafter as I allowed my eyes to wander over the outpouring stream. Through the midst of it I saw a big man with a coarse face and flowing mustaches plowing his way, his small evilly set eyes riveted upon me with ominous fixity. It was Richard Mackay, and the malevolent jealousy of his expression filled me with an unholy joy of triumph. I laughed point blank in his face as I seated myself beside my fiancee and tucked the robe close about her with lingering and ostentatious familiarity before throwing forward the lever. A sidelong glance stolen at her told me that she had not noticed him in the press, and with no reference to his having been present I sent the car humming homeward.

She asked me if I cared to come within for a few moments and together we were lifted to her floor. In her reception parlor I seated myself close beside her, gathering her hands in mine. The first intoxication of success had passed and a great, quiet joy had settled upon me, soothing and reposeful. Never had I been filled with better impulses than in this hour. In my victory the better side of my nature came uppermost in my gratitude to the Infinite. Firmly I resolved that my life in the future should be one of which no man might be ashamed, and for what I had done in the past that was unworthy I silently avowed amends. For the sake of the woman by my side I should lead a life that our sons would be proud to emulate. I would command her respect in all things. Speculation

I did not consider a moral offense. It was but a battle of money and wits, and to the victors of the earth the spoils legitimately belong.

I told her the general trend of my thoughts with much earnestness and she listened without comment, her face slightly averted and her hands resting contentedly in mine. I kissed her eyes and forehead and she sighed softly as her bosom rose. Just what the sigh meant I did not know and did not ask, but believed it was the responsive chords of her nature sounding to my touch. She had told me that she cared more for me than for any other man, and that under conditions which I appreciated were not unreasonable, she would rather live within my arms than those of any other person. Neither had she made my financial success an unqualified condition of our marriage, but had merely pointed out the great desirability of it as an added stimulus to my endeavors. That the principal reason she had advanced as to why she wished me to possess wealth was that I might be able to be more often at her side thrilled me with joy whenever it recurred to me. Had she not really loved me her desires in this respect must have been just the reverse.

The buzzing of the door bell aroused us from our close communion with a mutual start. It was an unusual summons, one sharp pressure upon the button closely followed by two more of some seconds duration each. At the first alarm her hands involuntarily tightened in mine, and as the longer notes hummed their insistence I saw the color rush from her cheeks in a scurrying tide. Her form straightened and grew tense, and arising she glided with swift noiselessness across the room and touched the button that summoned her maid. As though she had been waiting in the doorway Janet slipped into the room. Her mistress addressed her swiftly.

"Janet, say that I am not at home. Under no circumstance permit him to enter. If he says that it is important, tell him that he may call me up in the morning." Beyond all question greatly agitated she returned to near where I sat, placing herself before the piano in the attitude of one about to play. Her face was un-naturally bloodless and a thin, hair-like line about the corners of her mouth seemed to be constricting her lips. Altogether the change in her appearance was not to my liking, and the quick stealth of her movements caused a most uncomfortable sensation to run through me; a mingled feeling of guilt and doggedness as though I had been surprised in a forbidden bower by its rightful lord. A totally different type from the soft and perfectly poised creature of the moment before was revealed to me in those fleeting seconds of quick action and swift sentences, and my breath came faster before the contrast. In the few steps that had been required to take her across the room and back, her face had become that of a bolder, harder woman. The sensitive beauty of her mouth had been lost in its compression; her cheeks were like polished marble; the soft lustre of her eyes had turned into the glinting brilliancy of gems. Whether it was fear or anger or a blending of the two that had wrought this magic

transformation I could not determine. Almost breathlessly I watched the maid as she swung the door slightly and stood blocking the opening with her lithe form. From without rumbled the heavy tones of a man unsteady and thick from drink. "Good evening, Janet. I would like to see Mrs. Dace." The girl's answer was softly apologetic.

"My mistress is not at home." The reply which followed was preceded by a laugh.

"You know better, Janet. Tell her I wish to see her. Tell her, also, that it is a matter of importance."

"But I have said that she is not at home. But of course she will be here in the morning and you can then communicate with her. I have no doubt she will be pleased to hear from you."

In the instant of heavy hanging silence which followed I shot a glance at Mrs. Dace. She had leaned slightly forward, her hands clenched and her ears strained in the direction of the door. Then the notes of the man arose again, a sullen growl sounding through them.

"Did she order you tell me this nonsense or are you acting upon your own responsibility?" The voice of the yellow girl, theretofore respectful, took on a cold insolence.

"That is a matter for you to form your own opinion about. At least I am willing to accept any responsibility for what I may tell you. You may ask her concerning it when you see her again."

Plainly and distinctly Mackay swore, and I saw the door yield slightly to the pressure of a heavy hand from without. In the twinkling of an eye the maid's slender figure became that of an enraged panthress, and her tones rang out with positive viciousness. "If you try to force your way in here, against me I will have you thrown head and heels into the street by the employees. Release that door instantly."

He swore again, the pressure ceased and I heard his heavy step as it retreated down the hall. In a trice the maid had closed the door behind him and stood before us with a hot flush upon her face and her eyes averted. Mrs. Dace drew a long breath and her form and features softened. Once more she became the low-spoken, perfectly self-controlled woman of the minute before. "You did very well, Janet. I think that is all for the present. You may retire now." Noiselessly the girl slipped past us and disappeared behind the portiere.

I turned to her mistress. "What does this mean, Matie?" I asked quietly, but with the sickening sensation that I had experienced once before, making my knees weak and my throat dry. She faced me with an almost imperceptible lifting of her eyebrows and shoulders.

"So far as I know it means nothing except that Mr. Mackay has been drinking and wished to see me for some reason of which I am as ignorant as you are."

"But at this hour of the night! It seems strange that even a man like him should have the presumption to call. I think under the circumstances I have a right to inquire. Does he sometimes do such things?"

"He never has before. He had no right to do so now. If it is a matter of important business he should have notified me of his coming at least a few moments in advance."

"But what business could he possibly wish to confer with you about at such a time of night that could not be transacted over the telephone?" I pursued unhappily. She waved her hand.

"I am sure that I am as ignorant and disturbed over the affair as you can possibly be. When I see him again I shall demand an explanation. Then I will be able to tell you."

"And those rings—they sounded almost like a signal—one short and two long ones."

"It is one of his peculiarities. I think he so announces himself everywhere." She came close beside me, dropping her hand upon my shoulder. "You told me once that you would never mistrust me again. You are doing so now. I cannot wholly control the actions of others, and there are reasons why I do not wish to quarrel with Mr. Mackay unless I am driven to it. Your jealousy may ruin our prospects and make us bad friends after all. I do not feel flattered by it."

I got upon my feet and slipped my arm about her. "You must forgive me once more, dearest. While I admit that my love is a jealous one, yet where my heart is my faith also reposes. I trust you implicitly and will ask you nothing further. I was very much surprised, that is all."

She smiled upon me with a sweetness that was incomparable, and for an instant her palms held my cheeks. "You had better go now, Tom. It really is late and I am just plain, physically tired. You may kiss me good-night if you wish—just once."

She turned her cheek to me and my lips paid reverential tribute to it. She accompanied me to the door, her hands locked above my elbow, blew me a farewell from finger tips that touched her lips and disappeared behind the oaken panel. Sobered of spirit by the occurrence of a few minutes before, and despite myself somewhat depressed by thoughts which, notwithstanding the fact that I would not permit them to crowd themselves into my brain, nevertheless hovered upon the horizon of it, I started homeward on a brisk walk after having ordered the car, now hers, to one of the garages within the building. A vacant lot with a path cutting diagonally across it spread itself before me, and in accordance with my usual custom I took this short cut as

a saver of steps. The remains of a natural grove were scattered throughout it, and upon its center the night shades lay heavily. As I passed an oak that leaned over the path I was conscious of a slight rustling movement at my back and ducked my head with an involuntary quickness that is the gift of a natural boxer. Then I whirled with my heel for a pivot.

Close behind me through the murk I saw a big form lurch across the way I had just left behind me, thrown completely from its balance by a terrific blow that had been wasted in the empty air. In a flash I became a fighting machine; my fists knotted and muscles hardened as with my guard raised I edged towards him, on the alert for either attack or defense. At the same instant he regained his balance and came towards me. "You puppy," growled the heavy voice of Mackay.

Cold as ice, externally, but nevertheless with the fires of satisfaction burning fiercely within, I stepped backward and to one side, my left hand darting towards him in rapid felts. Knowing the man's reputation as I did, I was not in the least surprised at his attempted thuggery, and I now determined to give him the worst beating I was capable of without using more than my fists or endangering his life. His reputation was as an open book. When sober he used his brains for the destruction of his enemies, but when drunk the beast within him arose raging, and many was the man who, crossing him in his cups, had been felled unconscious by his great fist. Instinctively disliking him to the very core of my being, raging inwardly at the cowardliness of his attack, I stopped his approach by a straight left-hand blow that cracked like the report of a pistol and sent his head rocking. He was probably as powerful a man as myself, but much slower, much older and in much poorer condition physically and mentally. His bear-like rushes and swings I evaded without difficulty, sending his head backward with short, quick blows until his wine-filled mind whirled and he staggered as he tried to reach me. My time had come and deliberately I took full advantage of it. For the first time I used my right hand, sending it over his guard with the viciousness with which I would have struck at the head of a serpent. He spun in his tracks, threw up his hands and came down like a falling wall.

I stepped back, readjusted my coat and stood waiting. Perhaps thirty seconds later he stirred and climbed

sole injuries, which were confined to a pair of battered knuckles, I went to the nearest public telephone and called her up. She answered rather sleepily at first, her voice quickening a bit as I told her what had happened. But when I had finished I waited in vain for her answer.

"Have you nothing to say?" I inquired at length, rather coldly perhaps. Her voice came to my ears again, strained, it seemed to me, and somewhat expressionless.

"I very much regret that the affair happened. Certainly you did quite right to protect yourself. But I am really unfit to talk any more tonight. You may come and see me tomorrow and tell me more about it, if you care to. I wish you a restful sleep after your adventure. Good night."

Taking everything together, I went home fairly content. She had repulsed his attempt to call upon her; had made no attempt to excuse him for his actions then or later in his attack upon me; and all in all it had been a bad night for the enemy. In the nature of things, it was but natural that she should be more or less perturbed over the two disagreeable events of the night, and I could well appreciate that she might be reluctant to talk of such matters over a public telephone, with all its possibilities of unseen listeners. But I was confident that she would express herself with more warmth upon the subject when we were together on the morrow.

CHAPTER XIV.

Somewhat contrary to my expectations, Mrs. Dace had little to say concerning the matter when I next saw her. She accepted my version of the episode practically without comment, and when I tried to draw from her some expression of sentiment on the subject, she threw the whole matter bodily out of our conversation with the request that we talk about something less unpleasant. In a measure this disappointed me for the reason that I felt that I was entirely in the right and that she, therefore, should have been rather more outspoken in her approval of my actions. Still, I believed that I understood her thoughts. Mackay was her business agent; was in a position to be of great service to her, and for that reason she did not care to antagonize him by coming out in open partisanship over our disagreements. I had given him a handsome whipping and escaped unhurt myself, and so far as I was concerned, therefore, there had been no damage



"If I Don't Get You for This, You Will Be the First One That Got Away From Me."

to his feet after several unsuccessful efforts and stood rocking in his tracks as he wiped the blood from his face and glared at me. "If I don't get you for this you will be the first one that ever got away from me," he said, wickedly. For the second time that night I laughed in his face.

"At any time and place that suits you, Mackay. There is a beauty doctor a few blocks down the street—open day and night, I believe. I wish you a pleasant evening with the devil for your partner." He picked up his hat, coughed once in his peculiar way and disappeared without reply in the direction of the lighted street. Although I knew that I had made an unforgiving foe, against whom it had been charged and almost proven had more than once hired professional thugs to half kill his enemies; knowing also that there was no reason why he might not do the same in my case, I was still more than half glad that the affair had happened. At any rate, if he had any status beyond that of a business agent with the woman who had promised to be my wife, this incident would develop the fact. Even though he was her financial guardian he would be seriously embarrassed should he attempt to uphold himself in what he had done this night; and certainly if she cared for me at all she would express her satisfaction to me over the outcome. Nursing my

done. I accepted this as the natural solution of her desire to refrain from further comment upon the matter. From my own standpoint I considered myself invulnerable to him, except in the case of treacherous physical attack, and that I could guard against by watchfulness. Figuratively speaking, I snapped my fingers in his face.

Of Uncle Abner, still mumbling and grumbling like a bear stung upon the nose by a bee, I saw as little as I conveniently could. When I was at home I kept myself pretty close within my own quarters, and he seldom disturbed me beyond the occasional opening of the door to glare at me for a moment and then close it with a bang. In fact, he seemed to more and more consider me as responsible for his loss by reason of my not having been present upon the night of the assault. The few attempts I made to reestablish myself even partially in his favor met with such little success that I gave them up, leaving matters to take their natural course. The securities that he had previously kept in the safe he had now deposited in the bank, even going to the extent of reposing his gold watch among them and buying a dollar timepiece for his daily use. The experience of the night of the crime had seemed to make an arrant coward of him.

I had not seen LeDuc for several

days. I was anxious to meet him, as I was wondering considerably what he was up to, and was desirous of questioning him as to progress. Bruce I had hunted up on one occasion after my interview with the detective, and had found him in seemingly far better spirits than when I had last seen him upon the day after the burglary. He did not seem to hold it against me that I had charged him with having had the key, telling me he had no doubt but that I was honestly mistaken. But when I made a slight allusion to his operations on the board he shut up tight as a clam, which of course was unusual for Bruce. Therefore I did not feel warranted in pursuing the matter further. He was operating openly now and I thought as recklessly as ever, but whether his deals were being made on his own account or on behalf of some client I had no information beside what the detective had given me. Clare while equally uncommunicative about his business affairs, still remained defiantly loyal to him.

"I don't believe there is a crooked hair in Bruce's head; won't listen to anything that anybody may say against him, and have my own opinion of those who do," she asserted strenuously. I sincerely admired her fealty and told her so as I emphatically indorsed her views. Still I could not help secretly acknowledging that there were very ugly looking features about the case that I would have considered him wiser had he explained. But he seemed rather inclined to avoid me since the affair of the safe, and as it was his business after all, and as I did not care to be snubbed, I went my way and allowed him to go his without disturbance.

A few evenings later I happened to be standing in front of one of the leading hotels. I had nothing in mind that I cared to do, and was idly watching the passers-by when some one gave me a poke in the back and I turned to find LeDuc grinning at me. We shook hands and sauntered off together as I lied him for the latest information. He was mystically evasive.

"Talk about hustling," he said, with a short laugh. "A fly on a banquet table is idle beside the way I have been buzzing around. If there has been any busier man in town I would like to stand somewhere and behind something and watch him go by. He'd whizz like a bullet. I have run down every possible clue that I could get hold of and tried out every reasonable theory that I could conjure up, and at last know pretty near where to put my fingers next. Anyway, I know who stole the money." I stopped short, seizing him by the arm.

"Who?" I demanded. He pulled me along with him, gently shaking his head.

"Can't tell you just yet. It is always bad judgment to let a cat out of a bag until the right time comes. But I know who he is and I will tell you soon enough." Burning with impatience to know whom he referred to, but restrained from further questioning by the manner of his refusal to enlighten me, we continued our way for some distance without further conversation. In a certain sense, his statement was a shock to me, and I could not rid myself of a haunting impression that when he made his disclosures there would be disagreeable facts revealed. Yet my curiosity could hardly have been at a higher point.

"Are you positive?" I ventured after a while. If there was any doubt in his mind as to the identity of the criminal his voice did not betray it.

"As absolutely sure in my own mind as though I had been hidden in the room and seen him. But you know proving these matters to the satisfaction of other people is quite another proposition, and it is the proof that will convince those who do not wish to be convinced that I am after now." He turned to me with a slow scrutiny of my face. "But I am going to get that proof tonight, and I want you to help me."

I pondered his proposition over briefly. I could see no objection to acting upon his suggestion, and it might give me an inkling of whom he had in his mind. Therefore after a short reflection I agreed. "Very well, I will give you any assistance that I can. Where are you going and what do you want me to do?" He pulled out his watch.

"It is nine o'clock now and is as dark as it is going to be tonight. We can take a stroll around and inspect the place I want to visit. If the coast is clear we will go ahead; if not we can wait until it is." He uttered a little chuckle. "For your information, I will say that I am going to commit a burglary on my own hook." I must have hesitated a little in my pace, for he laughed, and taking me by the arm led me, half resisting, with him.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Naming the Gerry-mander.

The gerry-mander was christened in 1813, although it must have been in operation long before that. A stanch old Federalist, Gov. Elbridge Gerry, controlled through his legislature the redistricting of Massachusetts under the census of 1810.

In the office of Benjamin Russell, an ardent Republican editor, hung a map of the state as newly subdivided by Gerry and his men. Gilbert Stuart's ready pencil whimsically added to the outlines of a grotesque district the wings and tail of a dragon.

"Ha!" he said when he had finished. "How's that for a salamander?"

The Republican Russell growled: "Petter call it a Gerry-mander." And American politicians have taken his advice.—The Independent.